Melville Klauber House
3060 Sixth Avenue
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1962

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20240

MELVILLE KLAUBER HOUSE

Location: 3060 Sixth Avenue, San Diego, San Diego County, California.

USGS Point Loma Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 11.48412.362200.

Present Owner: Imperial Contracting Company, Incorporated, 1301 Hotel Circle South, San Diego, California (1971).

Present Occupant: Residence.

Significance: The Melville Klauber House is a significant example of the work of Irving J. Gill, showing the transition from his formative period to his mature style. The Klauber family was one of San Diego's early pioneers (dating to 1869); succeeding generations have continued to contribute to San Diego's commercial and cultural life.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The design of the house was begun in 1907. Construction was started in 1908 and completed in 1909.

2. Architect: The Melville Klauber House was designed by Irving J. Gill of the Gill and Mead architectural partnership of San Diego.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Melville Klauber was the original owner of the house. In 1908 he filed for a $21,000 building permit for the house. Melville Klauber died in 1932 at which time his son Allan and his family occupied the house. The house was sold to the Imperial Contracting Company.

4. Builder: Thorp and Shockley of San Diego, California.

5. Alterations and additions: The house is basically unaltered. Some changes to the windows have been made but do not affect the character of the exterior. Inside, the kitchen and bathrooms have been modernized.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. Melville Klauber: Melville Klauber was born in San Francisco on August 2, 1865. He was the eldest son of Abraham and Theresa Klauber, two immigrants from Bohemia (now Czechoslovakia); who had met and married in Sacramento in 1861. His parents moved to San Diego in 1869. In 1902 Melville married Amy Salz of San Francisco and later had two children.

When his father became ill in 1911, Melville took over as President of Klauber Wangenheim Company, which he headed until his death. Started in 1869 as Steiner, Klauber & Company, a general merchandise store, it prospered under Melville's leadership and grew to be one of the largest wholesale grocery firms in California. Today, at age 105, it is the oldest firm in San Diego County.

Melville became a prominent member of San Diego society and was active not only in business but in the cultural life of San Diego, as well. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce (1918-19) when the Barret Dam and the new Lower Otay Dam were completed. He was also involved, during this time, in the establishment of the U.S. Naval Training Center on Rosecrans Street and the U.S. Marine Base on Barnett Avenue. He served for many years as the Chairman and a member of the City Playground Commission, the California Military Welfare Commission, and as a Director of the California War Camp Community Service (the USO of the day).

Late in his life, Melville developed an interest in international economics. He traveled to Europe (including the USSR) and the Holy Land, and on his return gave lectures on his experiences and predictions. Melville died at age 67 on November 23, 1952.

2. Irving John Gill: Irving John Gill was born in Syracuse, New York in 1870. The son of a building contractor, his formal schooling extended only through high school. His early architectural training was through the family business and from a short term in a local architectural office. In 1890 he moved to Chicago and joined the architectural firm of Adler and Sullivan (one of his fellow draftsmen was Frank Lloyd Wright). Gill's major assignment during his two year stay with Adler and Sullivan was the Transportation Building for the Columbian Exposition. In 1892 Gill went to California for a vacation and decided to stay.

In 1893 Gill formed a partnership with W. S. Hebbard, producing such large half-timbered houses as the George Marston House (HABS No. CA-1960). Gill's partnership with Hebbard ended in 1906, and may formally mark the beginning of his transitional period. In 1907 he formed a brief partnership, lasting only a year, with Frank Mead. The buildings of this period, an example being the Melville Klauber House, look forward to his mature style in their increasing simplification of forms. With the design of the Holly Sefton Memorial Hospital for Children, and the Scripps Building at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, in 1908-09, Gill moved into his mature period. Both these buildings were constructed of concrete, a material that became Gill's favored building medium. He was fascinated by the Aiken Tilted concrete method of construction and, in 1912, bought the necessary equipment for construction from the United States Government.

His first use of the equipment was in the Banning House (1912, Los Angeles), and then in the La Jolla Women's Club (HABS No. CA-1957, (1913, La Jolla). He tried to start a company, the Concrete Buildings and Investment Company, to develop and popularize this method, but the venture was not financially successful. Gill's mature work is summarized by the Dodge House (HABS No. CA-355, 1914-16, Los Angeles), and the Scripps House (1916, La Jolla). Unfortunately the Dodge House was demolished in 1970, and the Scripps House remodeled beyond recognition. Gill, himself, provided the best summary of his building aesthetics:

> There is something very restful and satisfying to my mind in the simple cube house with creamy walls, sheer and plain, rising boldly into the sky, unrelieved by cornices or overhang of roof... I like the bare honesty of these houses, the childlike frankness and chaste simplicity of them. (The Craftsman, May 1916 Pages 147-148).

When he first moved to San Diego, Gill was an extremely popular architect. His nephew, Louis J. Gill (with whom he formed a partnership in 1914), reported that his office was fairly large, employing six draftsmen, one outside supervisor and a secretary, (McCoy, Gill p. 20). However, after 1915, his popularity began to wain, and in 1916 he closed his San Diego office and moved to Los Angeles. He produced few buildings in the twenties, and by his death in 1936, he was largely forgotten.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Original architectural drawings: Photocopies of a set of nine of the original drawings, courtesy of Mr. Allan Klauber (including details, plans and elevation), are included in the photodata set. The drawings were done between May and September of 1907 by a draftsman from the Gill & Mead office named M. Diggs.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Washington, D.C. National Register of Historic Places. National Register Nomination Form. (by John D. Henderson, AIA, May 1974).

San Diego, California. City of San Diego Historical Site Board Register. Site Number 49.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Centennial 1864-1969. San Diego: Klauber Wangenheim Company, 1969.

Ferris, Helen McElfresh. "Irving John Gill, San Diego Architect. The Formation of an American Style of Architecture." The Journal of San Diego History 17:1-17.

Gill, Irving John. "The Home of the Future: The New Architecture of the West." The Craftsman, May 1916, pages 140-151, 220.

Gill, Irving John. "New Ideas About Concrete Floors." Sunset Magazine: The Pacific Monthly, December 1915, pages 1164, 1166, 1168.

Heilbron, Carl H., editor. History of San Diego County. San Diego: The San Diego Press Club, 1936.

Jordy, William H. American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. Garden City; Doubleday & Company, Incorporated, 1972.

Klauber, Allan S. "90 Years in San Diego: The Story of K. W." San Diego Historical Society Quarterly. 5:43-45.

McCoy, Esther. Five California Architects.
New York: Praeger Publishers, 1960.

McCoy, Esther. Irving John Gill, 1870-1936.
Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum in Collaboration with the Art Center of La Jolla, 1958.

Prepared by P. M. Klauber
Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
March 18, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Melville Klauber House, designed by Irving Gill of the Gill and Mead architectural partnership, in 1907, is a noteworthy example of Gill's work during the transition from his formative period to his mature architectural style. Gill was on the threshold of developing his mature style, noted for its emphasis on simple, dominating cubical forms. By combining detailing used extensively in his late work with building forms of the previous phase, this fine residence emphasizes Gill's change in architectural expression. One notable feature in the house is the handsome stairway which leads from the first to third floor.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The two-and-a-half story building, with basement, is essentially a rectangle measuring 73' 6" (three-bay front) x 69' 9" (these measurements include the east porch and the western projection at the northwest corner). There is a covered porch at the southeast corner and a pergola structure at the northeast corner.

2. Foundations: The foundations are of poured concrete with footings, and have intermediate piers of poured concrete with footings.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: The building is of brick veneer construction, having a 2" x 6" stud (16" on center) wall with an air space and a 4" brick facing. The exterior surface is stucco and is painted a pottery beige (light beige). The total wall thickness is 14".

4. Structural system, framing: In the basement the foundation walls and piers support 2" x 8" timbers which in turn support 2" x 12" joints. Upper floors (2" x 12" joists) are carried on the walls. The roof is constructed of 2" x 6" rafters carrying 1" x 4" sheathing spaced 4" apart. The studio roof (in the attic) has 6" x 8" box beams. The porch roofs are of 2" x 10" joists; pergola timbers are 6" x 8" redwood beams.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: There is a terrace, with square brick floor tiles, across the east (front) elevation. Five brick stairs provide access to the terrace from the entry sidewalk. At the southeast corner there is a covered porch with segmental arched openings. It has the same brick tile floor. A new terrace has been constructed on the south side of the house to the west of this porch. At the northeast corner is a pergola structure. It has an earth floor and redwood timber roof lattice. A small service porch is located to the west of the pergola. At the northwest corner is an enclosed screen porch. A brick rear entry porch provides access to this porch, with a tall enclosing wall providing a visual barrier to it. Steps to the basement are located in the middle of the west side.

   On the second floor there is a porch at the center of the west (rear) facade. There is a balcony at the northwest corner over the screen porch. On the third floor there is a balcony off the studio on the north side of the house.

6. Chimneys: The two major chimneys of red, exposed brick are located at the north and south (gable) ends of the house about 10' from the east side. The two flues are of terra cotta. Both chimneys service the first floor rooms (living and music room); the south chimney also services the master bedroom on the second floor. The north chimney services the third floor attic studio. A third chimney of red brick services the basement furnace room and vents the kitchen range hood.

7. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The main entry door is of wood with two recessed panels (top of leaded glass, lower of wood), flanked by wall panels. The entry is emphasized by a substantial overhead stuccoed planter box. Other doors are of wood with glass panels and vary in size. Doors are on the south side near the east front, and on the west side to the screen porch (screen door). There is a new sliding glass door on the south side. Upper levels have doors to each of the balconies mentioned earlier.

b. Windows: The majority of windows are double-hung. The window units flanking the main first floor entry contain a fixed glass panel flanked with double-hung windows. The east facade, second level, contains six double-hung windows. Double-hung windows with sashes of varying sizes are on the other facades. All have plate or sheet glass units. There are also some casement and fixed glass units. With the exception of some metal casements on the first floor north side, all window frames and sashes are of wood.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house has a gable roof with a flare at the eaves. The ridge runs north to south. The roof slope is 30°. There is about a 4' overhang on all sides. The roof is of first quality redwood shingles, laid on two layers of waterproof paper and a single ply of deafening felt. The porch roofs are composition roofs.

b. Cornice, eaves: There are timber brackets at the gable ends composed of three redwood pieces laid flat. Each piece corbels beyond the lower one. The brackets support an 8" x 8" rough redwood beam. The soffit is of redwood board; the fascia is of redwood shingles. Along the side of the house, the eaves are similar to the ends. The corbelled timbers carry a 6" x 12" rough redwood beam. There are 4" x 8" redwood rafters. The ends of the roof slope are blocked out in a gentle curve; the fascia is shingled. At the eaves there are recessed gutters. The downspouts are of plain galvanized iron.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The plans of the house are relatively unchanged except in the kitchen and service areas where some remodelling has taken place.

a. Basement: Only a small portion of the foundation level has been excavated for basement space. The furnace room is situated near the center of the west side.

b. First floor: Central plan with two rooms on each side (north and south).

c. Second floor: The stairway rises to the center of the west side on this floor with three rooms along the east and two rooms on either side of the stairwell on the west elevation.

d. Third floor: The third floor has a large hallway along the center of the west elevation with two rooms on the south, a large studio on the north (Mr. Klauber's sister, Amy was an artist), and a storeroom on the east side.

2. Stairways: There is a handsome and spacious stairway along the vertical axis of the building. The stairs wrap around the western portion of the hall, creating an open well rising through three stories. The west wall has two layers of window openings, which flood the second floor hallway with light. Along the north side of the stair at the second floor a rail replaces the solid wall. The floors and stairways are of oak; the balusters of Port Orford cedar; the molded handrail, which conforms to the shape of the hand, is of cherry.

3. Flooring:

a. Basement: Concrete.

b. First floor: Stained oak except in the service areas where it was Oregon pine, (now tile).

c. Second floor: Stained maple in bedrooms; painted maple in bathrooms; stained oak in stairhall.

d. Third floor: Oregon pine except in stairhall (stained oak) and the bathroom (painted maple).

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The main rooms of the first floor have Port Orford cedar paneled dados with plaster walls above. Other rooms have flat board base moldings with plaster wall finishes. The studio has walls of redwood paneling. All ceilings are of plaster.

5. Doorways and doors:

a. Doorways between the major first floor rooms have double sliding pocket doors. The studio doors are double glass panel doors with flanking glass panels.

6. Decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Flat board trim is used to articulate the joining of wall to wall, wall to floor, and wall to ceiling, as well as to articulate the openings. The result is a linear patterning on wall surfaces in all rooms.

   There are built-in book shelves in the northwest corner of the living room and a built-in window seat on the south wall of the living room. The butler's pantry was originally outfitted with cabinets and cupboards.

7. Hardware: Standard hardware is used in addition to the pieces designed by Gill. The cabinets have right angle, sheet brass hinges of exceptionally simple design. The entry door has a large version of the same hardware.

8. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Heating: Forced air furnace.

   b. Lighting: The lighting is electrical power, although a few of the original gas fixtures are in place on the third floor.

   c. Plumbing: There was a 10' diameter cistern with a domed top; it stood 12' high and was of brick construction. Along with it was a water filter of concrete.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house is situated on a lot 95' long on the Redwood Street side and 105' along 6th Avenue (formerly Park Boulevard). The front of the house, facing 6th Street is to the East. The house has a lawn of about 25' deep on the front with only a small strip of lawn along the side (Redwood Street). To the south is an enclosed garden area. There is a wall along the west side of the lot and along a portion of the north side.

2. Outbuildings: There is a two car garage situated at the southeast corner of the lot with access provided from 6th Avenue. In the southwest corner of the lot is an earlier garage structure which is presently used as a storage shed.

Prepared by Robert G. Giebner
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August, 1971

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the San Diego Historical Society, the San Diego Historic Sites Board, the county of San Diego and the American Institute of Architects. The recording project was completed under the direction of James C. Massey. The Melville Klauber House was measured and drawn the summer of 1971, by Professor Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona) project supervisor, with student assistant architect Jashina A. Tarr (University of California at Berkeley); Ronald J. Lake (Ball State University); and Phillip P. Wisley (Ball State University) at the San Diego, California field office. The drawings were edited by William Klein in the HABS office. The historical written data was prepared by P. M. Klauber in March, 1974; the architectural written data was prepared by Robert C. Giebner in August, 1971. The data was edited and in some cases expanded in January, 1979 by Mary Beth Betts in the HABS office. Photographs were taken in August, 1971 by Marvin Rand.